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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PA](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA: REVERBERATIONS WITHIN EGYPT

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Classified By: DCM Matthew H. Tueller, for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: The Gaza crisis has inflamed a visceral hatred of Israel among Egyptians, and deepened disaffection for the Mubarak regime, furthering negative views of Mubarak as a "Western puppet." While GOE efforts to counter the negative propaganda may soften current hard feelings, the immediate perception among non-elite Egyptians is that Hamas "won," and many are applauding that, thrilling to the narrative of a "heroic resistance movement" successfully standing up to Israel's military might. The opposition Muslim Brotherhood (MB) successfully claimed the mantle of defender of the Palestinians, and, in the face of withering government security, organized the largest nationwide series of demonstrations in Egypt since the anti-Iraq war protests of March 2003, thereby showcasing its strength and ability, unique among Egyptian political forces, to move Egyptians to the streets en masse. End summary.

ANGER WITH ISRAEL; SYMPATHY FOR HAMAS

[2](#). (C) While Cairo's intellectual elite has a nuanced understanding of the Gaza crisis, and is broadly supportive of the GOE's actions, a larger segment of "ordinary" Egyptians are furious with both the Israelis and their own government. The searing images of dead Palestinian women and children have, for the moment, inflamed a visceral hatred of Israelis, particularly among Egypt's younger generation. Some contacts tell us that the crisis was a "seminal moment," akin to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, in hardening attitudes towards Israel, and furthering an abiding bitterness and sense of injustice. A few contacts predict that Egyptians are simply caught up in the heat of the moment, and their anger will soon subside, similar to diminished outrage after the 1982 and 2006 Lebanon wars; others opine that animosity over Palestinian civilian deaths will "linger for years."

[3](#). (C) Certainly, the widespread perception among Egyptians is that Hamas "won," and many are applauding that, thrilling to the narrative of a "heroic resistance movement" successfully surviving all that Israel's military might could throw at it. Scant attention is being paid to Hamas-Fatah rivalries; currently, Hamas is the face of all Palestinians, the "martyrs" whose people have paid a steep price in taking on the Israelis, and an outpouring of sympathy and support is tangible in conversations with middle and lower-class Egyptians. Even those few Egyptians who express doubts about Hamas' role still emotionally feel that Egypt "should have done more" to support Palestinians against the common enemy of Israel. As the crisis continued and Arab satellite TV channels broadcast graphic images of civilian deaths, many

Egyptians began to conceptualize the conflict as an Israeli war against the Palestinian people, not against Hamas.

SCORN FOR MUBARAK ...

¶4. (C) While sympathy and admiration for Hamas is on the upswing, public disaffection for the Egyptian regime seems to have deepened. The GOE's stance during the crisis has furthered negative perceptions of the government, and President Hosni Mubarak in particular, as a "stooge," "Western puppet," "morally bankrupt," and someone who equates his interests fully with those of Israel and the U.S.. One leading ruling party official lamented to us that "if Hamas is perceived as having won, it will be extremely damaging to moderates here ... there is so much respect for Hamas for standing up to the Israeli war machine, and it is difficult for us to compete with that." While foreign criticism of Egypt during the crisis, particularly from Qatar and Hezbollah, caused Egyptians (who tend to share a profound nationalism) to bristle and rally around the flag, several contacts report that "the reality is, we are all ashamed of how the government handled itself."

¶5. (C) Some local analysts have pointed to apparent class divides on the issue, observing that while the elite largely supports the government, poorer Egyptians, "who share with Palestinians a common experience of dispossession and oppression" are generally angry with Mubarak. At some pro-Gaza demonstrations, we also noticed this metaphor of working-class identification with Palestinians, with the

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government cast as the loathed Israelis; as riot police hauled away would-be demonstrators after Friday prayers, nearby shop-owners and passers-by often muttered, "They treat us like Israel treats the Palestinians!"

¶6. (C) Conversely, some working-class Egyptians, while outraged over Gaza, are largely caught up in their struggles to put food on the table, and see the Gaza war as having little to do with their daily lives. Some more sophisticated bloggers and activists have expressed to us appreciation for Mubarak's emphasis on protecting Egyptian interests and sovereignty during the crisis. Although they sympathize intensely with the Palestinian people, they do not want Egypt to be pressured into taking a direct role in Gaza. These contacts see Egyptian interests as coming first, and they reference Hamas' January 2008 border breach as evidence that the Palestinians pose some danger to Egypt. Most lower-income Egyptians we spoke with, however, do not take such a measured view.

... AND A RESURGENT MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

¶7. (C) The most striking images from Egypt during the Gaza crisis were the series of sustained, nationwide pro-Gaza demonstrations, largely organized by the opposition Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (refs A-E). Over the past year, the government has vigorously targeted the MB - arresting senior leaders and putting them before military tribunals, detaining hundreds of more junior members - and the conventional Cairene wisdom had been that the Islamist organization was weakened. Nonetheless, the MB was able to capitalize on pro-Palestinian sentiment during the crisis, claiming the mantle of defender of the Palestinians, and, in the face of withering government security, organizing the largest series of demonstrations in Egypt since the anti-Iraq war demonstrations of March 2003. In the last week of the crisis alone, we estimate that between 150,000-300,000 Egyptians participated in MB-organized demonstrations across the country. The MB also demonstrated an ability to enforce strict discipline during demonstrations, with protests

largely segregated by gender, and focused on Palestinians. While a certain chicken and the egg conundrum is at play (Were Egyptians protesting about Gaza because they support the MB? Or did they participate in MB-organized demonstrations because they were angry about Gaza?), the incontrovertible fact is that it was the MB that shepherded the protests, and that it is currently the only political force that has such an ability to get Egyptians to the streets en masse.

COMMENT

18. (C) In an Egyptian context, where protests rarely exceed 10,000 participants, the sustained large demonstrations over the past few weeks were highly unusual. Also notable was the government's near-zero tolerance, after the first week of the crisis, for protests in the capitol. While demonstrations proliferated elsewhere across the country, the security forces, by the thousands, rigorously policed any venue in Cairo where a demonstration was reported to be forming, likely signaling GOE sensitivity to the unfavorable optics of a large, implicitly anti-government event in the city. Overall, the Gaza crisis reinforced and deepened the antipathy of Egyptians towards Israel, highlighted the MB's popular resonance and PR-savvy ability to tap into heightened emotions surrounding the crisis, and underlined the overwhelming control of the Egyptian security forces.

SCOBey